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SUBJECT: THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN MOSCOW, PART ONE

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs Alice Wells.  
Reasons: 1.4(B/D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. This is part one of a two-part series on the typical experiences of immigrants in Moscow. The current cable describes the experiences of a partly disabled Chechen male who has lived on and off in Moscow for the past 20 years. The second cable relates the experiences of a Kazakh female who is a newcomer to Moscow. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) The subject of this cable, Adam, is a highly educated construction engineer who graduated from Moscow State University in 1991. He lived in Moscow during the First Chechen War, worked in Eastern Europe for a few years, and spent the Second Chechen War in Grozny. He currently lives and works in Moscow and sends money to his mother, wife, and three daughters who live in Grozny. Adam has been classified since childhood with a second-tier disability (severe and permanent) because of his poor eyesight.

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Registration With The Interior Ministry  
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13. (C) The problem of getting registered anywhere outside the Chechen Republic is very acute for Chechens. A landlord has to be strongly motivated and have a good knowledge of the laws and stamina to get the police to register a Chechen at his place of residence. The absence of registration creates numerous problems for Chechen migrants. They are often denied access to free medical services, although the law guarantees provision of urgent medical help. Getting a job with a legitimate employment contract and receiving state benefits and pensions become nearly impossible in the absence of registration. Enrolling children in kindergarten and school also becomes more difficult. Adam said his daughters were denied enrollment at several kindergartens and started school late because of the length of time and difficulties he had obtaining registration.

14. (C) Often police officers, who are obliged to regularly visit homes where Chechens reside, threaten rental landlords with trouble. As a result, landlords often reject "inconvenient" tenants or allow them to rent housing, but without registration. Rents are often increased for North Caucasians by USD 200-300 per month. Adam said he was rejected by landlords many times in the 1990s because "they didn't want his sort of person living in the building." When he tried to rent a private room in a dormitory, the landlord told him he had to provide an update about the tenants every week for the "structures," making Adam too much trouble at any price.

15. (C) Even when landlords give their consent, the struggle to get registered can last for months, if not years. Registration of Chechens is often accompanied by a humiliating procedure, which includes getting a permit for registration from the head of the local police precinct, a

special check for a criminal record, compulsory fingerprinting, and a mugshot. Adam confirmed that this was the procedure he was subjected to. His sister, who has lived in Moscow most of her life and is married to a non-Chechen, was visited 3-4 times a week by the police while he was in the registration process (prior to that she was visited 3-4 times a year). If a registration certificate is ultimately issued, a file is created on virtually every Chechen, like those created for criminals.

16. (C) These files are used to track Chechens, particularly when a terrorist attack happens. For example, following the Dubrovka theater incident in 2002, monitoring of legal Chechens increased dramatically in addition to mass "cleansings" of illegal Chechens and others in Moscow from the North Caucasus, Adam said. Chechen residences were visited more frequently, cellphones were checked to see what calls had been made to and from them, and phones were tapped.

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Obtaining Benefits Difficult  
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17. (C) Benefits without a registration certificate are granted only to those people from Chechnya who were registered as benefits receivers outside Chechnya before December 1997. All remaining residents of Chechnya, including those who left after hostilities resumed in August 1999, can get registered to receive benefits outside the republic only if they have a residence registration and a benefits file. Adam who has poor vision has been classified since childhood as having a second-tier disability and was eligible to be in the former category since he received

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benefits while he was at university. However, when Adam moved back to Moscow, it took him almost six months on top of his struggle for registration to be enrolled to receive disability benefits. During the process, he was accused of having a fake disability certificate (even though it is obvious he has difficulty seeing) and of submitting falsified documents. But only after he threatened several times to take the Social Benefits Department to court did he begin to receive the benefits. Adam said he was fortunate because he knew the laws and normative acts governing disability benefits, which are confusing and complicated, better than many new migrants. He said many give up because they are deceived and bullied by the authorities and because they don't know their rights well enough to persist.

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Problems Finding A Job  
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18. (C) Although Adam is highly educated and motivated, after the First Chechen War from 1994-1996, he found it nearly impossible to get a job in Moscow. Once prospective employers looked at his passport and saw that he was Chechen, they frequently rejected him even though he was qualified for the job. He was told "we don't want any problems for the firm because the police will keep checking up on you." So he spent the mid-1990s working in Eastern Europe, where he said he encountered no discrimination. He returned to Chechnya in 1998 and stayed there for part of the second war to support his elderly parents. He returned to Moscow in mid-1999 to earn money to send back to his family, who stayed in Grozny.

19. (C) The best job Adam could find on returning to Moscow was as a nightwatchman for a retail store. He was on duty at the store when the first apartment building was blown up in September 1999. The police visited the store -- only a few blocks from the apartment building -- hours later as part of the initial investigation into the bombing. Adam said he was treated well until they checked his passport. When they discovered that he was Chechen, they brought in OMON troops

who searched the store and started removing items. They beat Adam when he protested that merchandise could not be removed from store without notifying the owner. Adam was taken to the local police precinct and was told repeatedly that drugs would be planted on him if he did not admit to a role in the bombing. After being held incommunicado for almost 24 hours, they finally let him go. He was fired from that job a short time later.

¶10. (C) Although no one claimed responsibility for the bombings, Moscow Mayor Yuriy Luzhkov announced "Operation Whirlwind," enlisting over 20,000 law enforcement officials to undertake a massive anti-terror campaign. The operation ultimately rounded up 20,000 non-Muscovites, mostly ethnic minorities primarily from the Caucasus, and resulted in the expulsion of approximately 10,000 individuals who reportedly did not possess valid residence registration papers. Adam said that he felt lucky to "only lose his job and be subject to frequent identity checks" and not be expelled like many other Chechens.

¶11. (C) Adam said he was hired for his current well-paying job as Marketing and Sales Director at a pharmaceutical manufacturing company because the owner was a college friend who knew of his difficulties. He said if he did not have this job, the only alternatives open to him would be to either return to Grozny or menial labor. He said he was feeling secure at the moment because he had a good job and a strong support network of Chechen and non-Chechen friends who would be able to help him if he ever ran afoul of the police.

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Discrimination In Society  
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¶12. (C) According to a 2006 study by the Open Society Institute, riders on the Moscow Metro who appear non-Slavic are twenty times more likely to be stopped by police than those who look Slavic. Riders who appear non-Slavic make up less than five percent of all Moscow Metro users but account for over half of all people stopped by the Moscow Metro police. However, the study found that police stops uncover administrative document violations only three percent of the time, which calls into question the effectiveness of ethnic profiling for migration and anti-terrorist measures. Adam said that his personal record for being stopped by police was 10 times in a week, but that the last time he was stopped was in May. In his opinion, the situation was worse 3-4 years ago. The police are better at ethnic profiling now, he thought, and are targeting working-class migrants from everywhere -- not just Chechnya -- more frequently and

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leaving alone well-dressed, middle-class Chechens.

¶13. (C) Adam's daughters spent several years in Moscow before returning to Grozny. While in pre-school and kindergarten in Moscow, many of their classmates would use ethnic slurs without really knowing their meaning. They were simply repeating what their parents were saying at home. As the daughters got older, teachers treated them more harshly than their classmates. They were given lower grades because they would "eventually go back to Chechnya and didn't need good grades there."

¶14. (C) COMMENT. The level of xenophobia has ebbed and flowed with the Chechen wars and terrorist attacks in Moscow and other Russian cities. While Adam's case is somewhat complicated by his disability, he made it clear that his experiences with getting registered, renting an apartment, finding a job, and being racially profiled were par for the course for Chechen men in Moscow. He said if he could support his family by working in Grozny, he would move back, but for now he can make much more money in Moscow. This continued discrimination of immigrants, particularly from the

North Caucasus, is increasingly at odds with Putin's declared policy from May 2006 to "stimulate immigration to Russia," but it is in line with periodic opinion polls conducted by the Levada Center. In 2005, 58 percent of respondents categorically objected to foreigners buying apartments in Russia. Between 41 and 46 percent have consistently responded in polls over the last few years that ethnic Russians in Russia are poorer than members of other ethnic groups; only 6-9 percent think otherwise. As recently as August 2006, 51 percent of respondents believe that "ethnic minorities wield too much power in Russia."

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